B1 wcl.

(iii) propagating the starter culture organism cells for a period of time adjusted sufficiently in size to produce a desired amount of said cells; and

(iv) harvesting the propagated cells to provide said stock inoculum material which subset thereof can be used as said starter culture.

B2 Sub D3

5. (Once Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the amount of the subset of the stock inoculum material for direct inoculation of the cultivation medium in step (ii) provides a ratio of the CFU per g of cultivation medium, immediately after inoculation, relative to the CFU per g of the subset of the stock inoculum material being inoculated, said ratio being in the range from 1:100 to 1:100,000.

B3 Sub D5

7. (Once Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the cultivation medium in step (ii) may be any conventional medium used for propagation of microbial cells.

Sub D6

9. (Once Amended) A method according to claim 8, wherein the frozen subset of the stock inoculum material is thawed before direct inoculation of the cultivation medium in step (ii).

10. (Once Amended) A method according to claim 8, wherein the subset of the stock inoculum material is combined with an aqueous medium to obtain a suspension of the cells before direct inoculation of the cultivation medium in step (ii).

B4

11. (Once Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the direct inoculation of the cultivation medium in step (ii) is provided under aseptical conditions or under substantially aseptical conditions.

12. (Once Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the stock inoculum material is supplied in sealed enclosures.

16. (Once Amended) A method according to claim 12, wherein the sealed enclosures are supplied with outlet means for connection of the enclosure to a container comprising the cultivation medium, said outlet means permitting the concentrate of cells to be introduced substantially aseptically into the container to inoculate the cultivation medium with said concentrate of cells.

B5

17. (Once Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the starter culture organism in step (i) originates from a species selected from the group consisting of a lactic acid bacterial species, a *Bifidobacterium* species, a *Propionibacterium* species, a *Staphylococcus* species, a *Micrococcus* species, a *Bacillus* species, an *Actinomycetes* species, a *Corynebacterium* species, a *Brevibacterium* species, a *Pediococcus* species, a *Pseudomonas* species, a *Sphingomonas* species, a *Mycobacterium* species, a *Rhodococcus* species, an *Enterobacteriaceae* species, a fungal species and a yeast species.

B6

20. (Once Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the starter culture is a starter culture used in the food industry, feed industry or pharmaceutical industry.